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Media Representation and Political Legitimation:

The Case of Chinese Media - Focusing Specifically on Newspapers

Rong Zhang

Master of Research (MRes)

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Abstract

This dissertation adopts a sociological approach to political legitimation and explores the communicative aspect of the process in the Chinese context. The study examines both quantitatively and qualitatively the coverage in two newspapers of recent health care reform in China. One of these was a party organ, The People's Daily, while the other was a mass appeal newspaper, The South Metropolis Daily. The similarities and differences between the two newspapers and in the functions they seem to play in legitimating the Party-state are discussed. The study finds that the Chinese newspapers create a symbolic environment where the power of the Party-state is legitimated via appeal to shared beliefs about the common interest.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to add to our understanding of the nature of political legitimization, and the role of the mass media in this, both in general and specifically in relation to China; and to explore some research strategies that can be employed to do this. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What role do the Chinese media, especially newspapers, play in legitimating the Chinese state and the Communist Party?
2. What are the differences in this respect between those newspapers that are official party organs and those that are more independent in mode of functioning?

These questions will be explored through quantitative and qualitative analysis of the coverage of the health care reform in two newspapers of contrasting types.

The influential early twentieth century social theorist Max Weber points out that all states are based on the exercise of force. However, he also argues that long-term domination cannot be secured by force alone. The holding and exercise of power must be supported by some form of justification, so that the government can be recognized and accepted by the people, this constituting a necessary condition for effective governance. Therefore, the governments of all states must rely to some extent upon legitimation¹, on belief or at least

¹ There are many approaches to the concept of 'legitimacy'. To some, 'it suggests that there is a timeless quantity of an X-factor, which an actor does or does not possess'. Legitimacy, in this sense, is something

acceptance of their legitimacy by most of the population they rule, and may engage in various strategies in order to consolidate or increase this. However, the strains on legitimacy can vary considerably at different times: there can be problems or even crises of legitimation.

China, as a country undergoing transition from a traditional to a 'modern',² democratic society, represents a unique case of how a government/party-state struggles to establish and strengthen its exercise of power at different stages. After the Chinese Communist Party acquired its power through coup d'état and revolution that characterised by culmination of armed struggles in 1949,³ the Party-state had tried so many ways to secure its power, including military

measured against 'a standard that is posed as independent of the context in which the question arises' (Saward, 2010; p144). However, my attempt here is not in concern with political legitimacy in general or universal standards for political legitimacy. In this paper I will adopt Beetham's model of legitimation of power that requires constant effort. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use 'legitimation', which suggests an open-ended process. The term 'legitimacy' here 'equates to provisional forms of legitimation over time' (ibid). (see more details in the section 'literature review')

² 'Nationalism' and 'Modernity' are two themes of China's contemporary history. There is no clear-cut definition of what 'modernity' means for China. However, one thing clear is that China is trying to reach the Western standards of modernization in the aspect of technical innovations. This is reflected in, for example, the prosperity of urban centers such as Shanghai. See Hudson, A. (2008) and Ramo, J.C. (2004)

³ According to Beetham, this kind of power can be characterised as illegitimate because it is acquired through a breach of the constitutional rules (1991). Therefore, revolutionary regimes, such as China, must face a painful process of relegitimation.

modernization, nationalism, and an emphasis on economic growth.⁴

Media, as a tool to communicate with diverse groups, has been assigned prominence since Mao's time. This paper focuses on printed media to analyse the process of political legitimization in China today. In this chapter, I intend to explain the strategies designed to gain legitimization used by the Chinese party-state at different stages. Moreover, the mass media, which command a sensitive location in the Chinese Communist system, has also gone through dramatic changes. The second part of this chapter will introduce the reform of China's media system.

1.1 Legitimation of the Party-state in China from 1921 to 1978

During its eighty years of history the legitimization of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has experienced three stages of transformation. From 1921 to 1978, it depended mainly on the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which prioritized class struggle in socialist society. During this period of time, the power of the Party was also maintained through its control of all aspects of economic life, from prices and wages to major investment decisions and resource allocation. The

⁴ See, for example, Lieberthal, K (1995).

rationale for this planned economy derived from the socialist concept that production should be directed towards people's needs and towards bringing about an equal standard of living for all, rather than towards individual profit (Shleifer, 1997). However, it is questionable whether this control of the economy fostered social development during Mao's era. Moreover, Mao's heroism and his exemplary character were also a chief source of legitimation in addition to communist ideology⁵. This is illustrated by the pervasive personality cult all over the country under his leadership. Nevertheless, Mao's charismatic legitimation ended shortly after his death. Meanwhile, the Marxist-Leninist ideology had been questioned by many who believed that it was not sufficient to justify the Party's governance (Zhang, 2000).

1.2 Political Legitimation in China from 1979 to mid-1990s

Starting from 1978 economic reform and growth largely replaced communist ideology in sustaining the legitimacy of Communist party rule. During the first decade of reform, economic growth was seen as the key to political stability and

⁵ Some scholars suggest that nationalism is an influential motif in the modern history of China, that the legitimation of Chinese Communist Party also relied (partially) on nationalism after it took over the power. Mao's personal cult, communist ideology and nationalism are concepts intertwined with each other. See Zhang (2000).

became a new path for development. Deng Xiaoping re-analysed socialism, suggesting that productivity is the driving force of all social development and economic development is an inevitable step towards socialism. He points out that the nature of socialism is to liberalize and develop the forces of production, thereby eliminating exploitation and polarization between citizens (Deng, 1995). In his opinion, economic productivity was the ultimate approach to solving political problems (Deng, 1994).

There are two aspects to this strategy of building the legitimation of the Party-state on economic growth. Firstly, there is a direct process of legitimation, whereby the declared commitment of the Communist Party to satisfying the people's material needs is designed to gain their support. Secondly, there is an indirect process whereby bringing about economic growth would consolidate support for the Party because people felt the benefits of their policies and saw 'the advantage of socialism'.

The process of economic reform is primarily associated with the emergence of markets (Heberer and Schubert, 2006). This development in the economy was stimulated by a loosening of Party control over economic enterprises. The result was the transformation from the planned economy of Mao's era, when the distribution of social resources was tightly controlled by the central government, to a 'socialist market economy' that combines the power of the market with 'the

power to make high-level decisions firmly controlled by a tiny group of high-ranked CCP officials' (Yao, 2002; p289).

However, very rapid economic growth was difficult to sustain. The growth rate of the Chinese economy declined from over ten percent per year in 1992 and 1993 to 7%-8% in 1999. The core problem for the CCP since the beginning of the economic reform has always been how to achieve continued economic growth and to master the rising complexities of this economic and social development without endangering one-party rule (Heberer and Schubert, 2006). Economic growth as a source of legitimation is, as Zhang suggests, like a contract between the government and the people – 'I will bring you economic growth and you must accept my governance' (2000; p14). Once the rate of growth slows down the domination of the Party-state will be questioned. The Tiananmen Square protests, which happened in 1989, served as a warning to the central government about people's claims to democracy and the potential for social unrest, which were rarely identified in the economic sphere.

Moreover, although economic development spread all over the country, it was uneven due to Deng Xiaoping's regional development policies that emphasize efficiency over equity (Fan, 1997)⁶. There were imbalances between south and

⁶ 'Uneven development' and the priority of efficiency over equity are characteristics of capitalist development too. Deng believed the uneven regional development is 'a natural and inevitable outcome of

north, coastal and inland regions, as well as between urban and rural areas of China. The southern shore regions were generally more developed than other regions, apart from several large cities such as Beijing, which is the centre of China's politics.

On the one hand, the ideology of communism has been challenged as a result of the opening-up of the domestic market. On the other hand, imbalanced (regional) development intensified the disparity between social classes, which in turn triggered people's doubts as to the equity of economic policies (Zhang, 2000). The government, therefore, had to find an additional source of legitimation. Starting from the mid 1990s this was pursued through the implementation of 'political structural reform'.

1.3 Political Legitimation in China since mid-1990s

The economic improvement not only brought material well-being, but also accelerated the transformation of social structures. Nevertheless, the pace of social transformation and political reform lagged behind the rapid mount up of economic power. In other words, the uneven development and associated

the development processes'. He suggested that China was at an early stage of development, and that the regional inequality appearing during this initial stage would decline at a more advanced stage. In other words, those regions with advanced economic development at an early stage would stimulate less developed areas (Fan, 1997, p632).

possession of economic and political power by elite class intensified the divide between rich and poor, as well as between other social groups⁷. This is illustrated by the huge disparity in income between the minority who made a fortune overnight and peasants and laid-off workers (Zhang, 2000). It is this pervasive inequality, from health care to political participation, which triggered a series of social contradictions and problems. These in turn led to uncertainty and threats to the stability of Chinese society⁸.

Several non-economic reforms – legal, administrative, social and political – were introduced in China during mid-1990s. These reforms were aimed at pursuing new growth-based legitimacy. The Chinese Government refers to these reforms as ‘political structural reform’⁹, which is an instrumental agenda to consolidate Communist rule over a rapidly changing Chinese society (Wu, 2000; Heberer & Schubert; 2006). The content of this agenda includes:

‘separating the Party from the government; delegating central state power to lower administrative levels; streamlining the government bureaucracy;

⁷ The divide is not new. There was division between high ranking party officials and peasants in Mao’s time as well. The economic and social changes in China have made it more open and intense today.

⁸ These social contradictions and unrest take form of social protest. See for example, Gries and Rosen (2004) and Weng Li and Li Zhong-shu. (2004).

⁹ In 1986 Deng Xiaoping used the term ‘*zhengzhi tizhi gaige*’ (political structural reform) for the first time.

professionalizing the cadre system; establishing new feedback mechanisms between the Party and the people; strengthening the monitoring and law-making functions of the People's Congress system and the mass organisation; and implementing a socialist rule-of-law system' (Wong, 2005; p10)

The ultimate goal of this remoulding of the political system of one-party rule is to bring about 'socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics', which is considered modern and legitimate (PRC State Council, 2005). This objective of political reform places emphasis on the rule of law, which aims at '[bringing] a high degree of participation inside and outside the Party and sound institutional checks and balances' (Heberer and Schubert, 2006; p19). In other words, the expressed objective is to improve citizens' access to political participation¹⁰ and to facilitate supervision of the government by the general public.

In 1997, Party leader Jiang Zemin put forward the basic principle of 'running the country according to law' at the Fifteenth National People's Congress, emphasising the importance of improving the legal system within and outside the Party (Jiang, 1997). This move is recognized by scholars as the Party's intention

¹⁰ For example, the development of village elections is one of the most prominent political reforms of the Communist regime in the reform era (Bernstein, T. P. and Guo, Z.L., 2004).

to rebuild its legitimation via an emphasis on legality (Zhang, 2000). In terms of political structural reform it is 'supposed to establish accountability, transparency, reliability and trust among the people' through the process of enacting and improving the state laws and regulations (Heberer and Schubert, 2006; p19).

Nonetheless, Zhang (2000) argues that under one party rule, the 'law' is always confused with the Party's policies. 'According to law' is actually equivalent to 'according to the policy of the Party-state' and vice versa. Actually the Party's policies have more priority than the law. Thus, the 'law' is an instrument or tactic that serves the Party's domination. The aim is to turn the Party's policies and guiding principles into law, so that the practice of the Party-state can be legitimized through appeal to legality. The Party is the maker and executor of laws. It is both the 'subject' and the 'object' of laws and regulations. Therefore, it is the Party, instead of the 'law', which forms the ultimate source of legitimation of power (Zhang, 2000). In other words, the Party is in control, but legality is a means of legitimating this control.

The current official view is that China should create a Chinese-style 'harmonious

society’¹¹ and gradually enhance the participation and the prosperity of its people while at the same time focussing on the improvement of the existing system prior to democratisation (PRC State Council, 2005). This updated political principle considers that the main task of the government is to create stability and trust between the government and the people in order to tackle social contradictions and cleavages (Qiang, 2004). This is illustrated by the government’s attempt to shift from a ‘regulation-oriented government’ to a ‘service-oriented government’. The current focus on the education system, the transformation of public health care service, and emphasis on environmental issues, all illustrate this change of government function in the domain of public service (Wu, 2004; Zhou, 2006).

1.4 Transition of China’s media system and the changed relationship between media and the Party-state since 1979

Changing forms of legitimation and economic development have had a huge influence on media development in China. One essential component of the political structural reform is to change the role of the media to be more

¹¹ The concept of ‘harmonious society’ was first put forward in 2004 by Hu Jintao. It refers to ‘society characterized by social equality and political harmony as opposed to the dangers of a neo-liberal market society characterized by consumerism, material wealth and the maximization of profit’ (*Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), 9 March, 2005).

independent, to reflect public opinion and to establish an effective feedback mechanism between the government and the people (Mao, 2004; Wong, 2005). Along with economic development, opportunities for market competition have been enhanced by relaxed central control.

In Chan's words, '[mass media] are regarded as an important part of the ideological apparatus that is indispensable for legitimating the Party-state, indoctrinating the public and coordinating campaigns' (2003; p159). In Mao's era, controlling the pen and the gun were seen as equally important for maintaining government power. Originally, the Chinese media were considered the Party-state's mouthpiece and regarded not as enterprises but as political units. All media were organized by both state administration and by a control system run by the CCP (Chan, 2003).

Economic development since 1978 has had a great impact on the transformation of both the infrastructure and the function of the Chinese media. This process of media marketisation is characterized by what Chan called 'the CCP's disjunctive approach to development', which means maintaining ideological control on the one hand and allowing marketisation on the other (1993). Although the Party's ideological rein over the media has not been loosened as much as has happened in other industries during two decades of economic and political reforms, there is evidence that the newspaper industry is moving toward more 'flexible

professional practices, greater diversity in content composition, higher level of self-determination in institutional management, increasingly secularized editorial orientation, and a gradual weakening of its traditional mouthpiece function' (Guo 2001, p13; Pan 1997; Chu 1989; Cang, Wang and Chen 1994; Chen and Huang 1996).

Guo (2001) suggests that the changes in the Chinese media have largely been commercially driven rather than politically initiated. In general, the post-Mao media transformation is characterized by the rise of economic imperatives. According to Lee et al. (2006), the transformation of the media can be divided into two phases: the first was the introduction of the elementary components of advertising into the operation of media in the 1980s in order to strive for financial autonomy. This was enforced by the party-state's decision to cut off media subsidies, due to budgetary constraints; the second was after 1992 – the start of the 'second wave' of commercialization (2006; Wu, 1994). In 1992, the National Working Conference on Press Management formalized policy for commercialized publications, which is to abandon financial subsidies to all press apart from a few vital partisan organs, such as the *People's Daily*, the *Economic Daily*, and the *Qiushi*¹². Instead, advertising was to substitute for state subsidy as

¹² Party organ newspapers, including *People's Daily*, continue to receive from the state as much as 95% subsidy on subscription.

the revenue source for the press. This is reflected in recognition of the 'commodity nature' of the press (Chan, 1993).

There are four main sources of revenue, with varying weights, for the newspaper industry in China: circulation, advertising, printing service, and sideline business. Among them, circulation and advertising account for most revenue. Moreover, income from advertising has been on a steady rise and is expected to exceed income from circulation. This growth of advertising revenues in the newspaper market has allowed the majority of the press to become not only financially self-sufficient but also profitable ¹³(Lee, He and Huang, 2006).

This deepening commercialization of the media sector and recognition of market functions has, to some extent, depoliticized the media. It has become increasingly responsive to audiences' preferences as a result of intensive competition (He and Chen, 1998). Accordingly, new theories have emerged, which can be roughly divided into two types. On the one hand, some believe that market power will ultimately undermine the control of the government. This view was common in

¹³ There are no privately owned mass media publications in China, all are still under the direct or indirect control of the party and central government. In this sense, the media market is not a 'free market' where the invisible hand manipulates the relationship between provider and consumer. Instead, the media operates under the party-state's protectionist policies and land grants (Guo, 2001; Lee, He and Chen, 2006). For administrative control of media market in China, see Chan, M.J. (2003).

studies before 2000¹⁴. However, others have expressed doubt about the possibility of economic power overcoming the control of the party-state completely¹⁵. Although there has been intensified commercialization of the Chinese media, it is still under the instruction of the party-state.

There are no clearly defined political goals assigned to the media by the party-state, and the coping strategies adopted by the media in response to the government's regulation and censorship are becoming more powerful (Guo, 2001). However, despite the attempts to push the limits of news reporting there is still a taboo for all mass media in China: there must be no violation of the norms of political legitimacy. In this sense, no news is published without external or self-imposed prior restraint. As Zhou points out,

‘Through administrative agencies, such as the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) at the pinnacle of the administrative pyramid of the press control and its provincial and sub-provincial administrations, licensing, centralized allocation of resources, preferential policy treatment and regulatory constraints, the state continues to intervene in the operation of the media market. Yet the state power is decreasing with the press sectors being

¹⁴ See, for example, Chen and Huang (1996).

¹⁵ See, for example, Chan (1993) and Yu (1994).

closer to the market sphere, while the market power is increasing' (2007, p7)

Zhou (2000) argues that the Chinese media have been transformed from a brainwashing state apparatus to what he calls 'Party publicity Inc'. The task of the latter is to promote a positive image of the Party-state. In other words, commercialization endows the media with a capitalist body, whilst the Party's administrative control keeps the media with a socialist face (Zhou, 2000; Lee, He and Huang, 2006).

There are several types of newspapers in China. First, there are Party organ newspapers, and these can be classified further into two categories. The first are run and directly controlled by the CCP propaganda departments at different levels. '[They] represent the orthodox party-line voice in the central government, various provinces and autonomous regions and municipalities' (Zhou, 2007; p7). Moreover, these papers are given editorial and managerial privileges as well as closer attention from high-ranking officials (Chan, 2003). The second kinds of organ newspapers belong to government or government-related organisations. Chen and Lee (1998) classify these newspapers into 'target presses' and 'enterprise/industry presses'. The former are newspapers targeted mainly at specific types of reader based on occupational backgrounds. They are published by official or semi-official organizations (e.g. *China Farmer's Daily*). The others are newspapers published and circulated internally by government departments

or large state-owned enterprises (e.g. *China Enterprise News*). According to Zhou '[these papers] function as the institutional voice of a given organization, institution, or enterprise aimed at promoting its policies and the operational goals while serving specialized readers based on occupational backgrounds and/or socio-economic interest. They are more self-financially supported because they do not have the privileges of resources that their Party organ peers enjoy' (2007; p9).

The other main type of newspapers is commercial¹⁶. They are found in large or medium-sized metropolitan areas and 'are now the majority of newspapers in China in terms of circulation and advertising revenue' (Zhou, 2007; p9). They are often characterized by a very parochial content focus, which are designed to attract private subscriptions and a variety of consumer goods advertising. Therefore, the contents are less ideologically oriented and have less rigid propaganda rhetoric than the party mouthpieces. Also, they have a more liberal editorial approach than the Party organs, and are more willing to expose local social problems with more aggressive reporting. As a result, they command a

¹⁶ According to Chen and Lee (1997), commercial newspaper includes two types of newspaper – mass appeal papers and tabloid format papers. The content of the latter relies completely on recycled stories through translation or selection from other media and they have low circulation and public attention. This kind of paper is neither politically nor economically important today. Therefore, I will use the concept of 'commercial newspaper' as referring to mass appeal papers.

wider audience (Chan, 2003).

The rapid transformation of the economic environment and growing social discontent in recent decades has given rise to urgency regarding the legitimization of power by the Party-state. Thus, an interesting question is raised:

What role does the Chinese media, especially newspapers, play in the party-state's legitimization strategies?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The sociological approach to legitimation

Political legitimacy – an issue for any regime – is one of the central concepts of political science that deserves sustained attention. It is a quality that all political structures must be seen to have to some extent (Lilleker, 2006). As a property of governance, legitimacy is composed of an empirical component (public trust and support) and a normative component (justifiableness according to norms, values, traditions) (Meyer, 1999). This dual nature of legitimacy is best summarized by Gurr's one sentence definition of the nature of legitimacy – 'government can be considered legitimate in so far as its subjects regard it as proper and deserving of support' (1971, p185). However, the concept of legitimacy is problematic, in particular because it 'links global attributes of the political system with the orientations of individual citizens' (Weatherford, 1992; p150).

Different political theorists have put forward different explanations to account for political legitimation. Brown (2005) summarizes the debate on political legitimacy into three approaches: normative approaches, prudential approaches and constructivist approaches. Normative approaches to the question of political legitimacy focus on the reasons 'why citizens ought to support the state and obey

its law, in the sense that the reasons for this relate to what it is morally right for autonomous individuals to do' (p7). They approach the question of political legitimacy in terms of 'political obligation' and try to explain the 'moral duty' that citizens have. Prudential approaches focus on the utility or self-interest of citizens' political obligation to support the state and obey its laws. The basic question for these approaches is 'why do citizens support the state and obey its laws?' Instead of looking for reasons why citizens obey the state, the constructivist approaches view the question of political legitimacy as 'how are citizens rendered supportive and obedient to the state under which they live'. According to a constructivist approach, citizens are 'inside' the political processes that mould them and their actions and responses are constructed by the requirements of those processes with or without their awareness (Brown, 2005; p7-8).

Social scientists often investigate legitimacy from two different angles (Barker, 2007). In a normative vein, political systems and institutions are assessed against a set of a priori criteria on which 'the rightfulness of governance arrangement presumably hinges' (Hurrelmann et al. 2009, p485). In contrast to this, the analyst in the empirical vein takes the role of observer, 'examining other people's legitimacy evaluations and tracking the criteria that underpin them' (ibid). In this paper I take the second perspective, considering legitimacy and

legitimation processes as social facts. Weber provides an influential model for this approach.

According to Weber legitimacy derives from people's beliefs. It is the *belief in legitimacy* on the part of relevant social agents, and power relations are legitimate only if people involved in them believe them to be so (Beetham, 1991).

He identified three ideal types of legitimate domination: legal, traditional, and charismatic. The sociological approach adopted by Weber is concerned with the issue of whether or not a state is believed to be legitimate, it does not involve the analyst in making a judgment about whether the claims it makes to legitimacy are sound or true. This is not the task of the social scientist. So, the focus is on the influences that people have been exposed in order to (re)produce belief in a state's legitimacy, or the capacity of a particular political system to engender and maintain belief (ibid).¹⁷

Beetham sees the Weberian approach to legitimacy as problematic. However, he claims that the problem is not that it fails to meet the normative criteria of political philosophy, as suggested by others, but that, firstly, it misrepresents the relationship between beliefs and legitimacy and secondly, it does not take

¹⁷ This Weberian approach has attracted many criticisms. For example, Robert Grafstein criticizes this approach on the grounds that 'the concept should properly signify a normative evaluation: the correctness of its procedures, the justification for its decisions, and the fairness with which it treats its subjects' (1981; p456).

account of those aspects of legitimacy that are irrelevant to beliefs. Therefore, Weber's approach does not provide social scientists with sufficient means of understanding legitimacy across different contexts (Beetham, 1991). From Beetham's point of view, 'a given power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms of their beliefs' (1991, p11). Therefore, one thing we must do in assessing the legitimacy of a regime is to make 'an assessment of the degree of congruence between a given system of power and the beliefs, values and expectations that provide its justification' (ibid). Moreover, the Weberian approach to legitimacy also ignores elements, such as legality and consent, which are not really to do with belief. Beetham therefore puts forward a more detailed model of political legitimacy, which takes account of the ongoing process of legitimation.

Beetham (1991) argues that there are three criteria for political legitimacy: *conformity to rules*, *justifiability of rules in terms of shared beliefs* and *legitimation through expressed consent*. The first criterion refers to legal validity – the law as the ground of legitimacy. It is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for legitimacy. A perceived illegitimacy will result from a breach of rules. The second criterion refers to 'the relevant beliefs being shared between dominant and subordinate [groups]' (p96) and it 'implies the normative justification of these rules in terms of the rightful source of political authority and in terms of the

proper ends and standards of government' (Holbig, 2006; p10). Beetham distinguished a number of considerations that are relevant: (1) authoritative source, which includes both external sources (religious belief, natural law of doctrines and the law of science) and internal sources (habits and/or belief in tradition; people – the precise definition of the people and type of representation adopted); (2) justifiable content of rules, which is comprised of the principle of differentiation between dominant and subordinate and the demonstration of common interest uniting these. Beetham argues that in most 'modern' states the notion of governing in the 'common interest' of society plays an important role in the justification of power. The last criterion is the expressed consent, which Beetham divided into two modes: electoral mode and mobilization mode. The former concerns actual choices available, whilst, with the latter mode (especially for a single-party regime), consent is expressed through continuous mass participation (Beetham, 1991).

These criteria of legitimacy are time- and space-specific, which Beetham labels 'legitimacy-in-context'. He states that for social scientists there are no ideal criteria for consent, instead this must be judged against the conventions of the particular society, so that the power relations could be judged as either legitimate or illegitimate. In this sense, Beetham is not suggesting that the concept of legitimacy provides the basis on which people should decide whether or not

some law or policy is legitimate. Instead, it is part of his attempt to produce concepts that are value-relevant but not evaluative in a practical sense. In other words they do not imply that, for example, if a majority expresses consent to a law we should obey it.

In short, Beetham speaks of legitimacy where 'a regime and its governance arrangements are found to meet certain standards of acceptability' (1991; p3). This approach, by suggesting the moral and normative aspects of power relationships that make up legitimacy, allows researchers to study the concept empirically from a social scientific perspective, treating people's behaviour as the central issue for researchers to understand. It is empirically executable in the sense of seeing legitimacy as a social fact¹⁸ to be understood rather than something that can/should be judged against idealized moral standards. Also, compared with political approaches that study legitimacy at a system level, Beetham's approach provides researchers with an opportunity to investigate legitimacy from the perspective of subordinates within a power relationship. This is an important feature of my research. By linking the concept of legitimacy with media discourse, I do not want to evaluate the state or its 'legitimacy' but rather to explore the process and the effects of behaviours associated with the

¹⁸ 'A social-scientific analysis of legitimacy is concerned with the effect it has on the character of a given relationship, and on the behavior of those involved' (Beetham, 1991: 25).

establishment of legitimacy.

In next section, I will discuss the relationship between legitimation and political communication, especially the role of media in the process of legitimation.

2.2 Political communication: media and political legitimation

Political communication is the communication between the ruling organizations of a society and the people. It is crucial for 'the building of a society where the state and its people feel they are connected' (Lilleker, 2006; p1). Traditionally, the field of political communication has concentrated on the production of political messages and their impact, especially during election campaigns. This includes researches dealing with processes of communication that relate to political matters and, more broadly, researches on the distribution and maintenance of power in democratic societies (Negrine and Stanyer, 2007). In addition to the traditional focus, the development of technology and the process of socio-economic changes have extended the field as a whole.

There are three actors in the process of political communication. Firstly, the political sphere itself which refers to the state and its attendant political actors. Their role is to gain legitimacy among the people through communicating their

actions to society. Secondly, there are non-state actors, including a range of organizations with political motivations, corporate bodies and voters. With the hope of generating some level of influence, they also try to communicate their messages into political sphere. Finally, there are media, which communicate political messages, influencing both the public and the political sphere. Harold Lasswell's question in a US doctoral dissertation studying propaganda effects best summarized the common basis largely shared by political communication theories – 'who says what to whom via which channels with what effects?' (Lasswell, 1927; cited in Lilleker, 2006).

So what does political communication have to do with legitimization? Sarcinelli suggests that 'approval of governance depends on a continual process of public reasoning and scrutiny, which is realized in and through political communication' (1998; p551, cited in Meyer, 1999; p620). According to this point of view, political communication is a necessary supplement to the process of legitimization. The process of legitimization is intrinsically communicative.

Political legitimization involves the exercise and maintaining of power, which is demonstrated in a number of ways through action and communication. According to Weber's and Beetham's approaches legitimacy is not only about the behaviour of government/the powerful but also about cooperation from the subordinate. It is an on-going process of interaction between the two. In this

sense, the legitimacy of any given regime or government is the perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the publics it communicates to and with (Lilleker, 2006). Any given regime or government that claims legitimacy is claiming to represent the interests of the people. These claims must be made through communication. The media play an important role in this process.

Apart from direct interactions with the stakeholders/citizens, another way for government to win and maintain its legitimacy is to communicate with different interest groups through the media. Nevertheless, media do not operate neutrally. McNair suggests that the media acts not only as transmitter of political communication, simply delivering information from sender to receiver, but also as sender of political messages constructed by the journalists (McNair, 2003). Media, in this sense, forms an important part of the symbolic environment in which the government's claims to legitimacy operate.

In McNair's words, 'political communication is largely mediated communication. The media alter the message, in their roles as reporters of and commentators on it. They are, therefore, political actors in their own right' (2003, p.28). The media transmit messages from political organizations to the public and vice versa through various processes of 'news-making' and 'interpretation'. In this way, they are crucial to both public attitude formation and to the policy process (Molotch et al, 1987; cited in McNair, 2003). This is best understood from the

perspective of the sociology of knowledge.

The sociology of knowledge approach argues that 'sociological force is powerful in determining how and what type of knowledge is cultivated in society at a given point in time' (Chang et al. 1994; p54). Moreover, effective means of communication are necessary for a society to function properly. A shared culture, which required by this social communication, depends on 'the continued transmission of specific knowledge to members of the community' (ibid). In the domain of news, this should be conceptualized as a stock of social knowledge for the reason that it provides 'a kind of knowledge that is culturally bound and socially constructed, helping to hold society together' (ibid). In other words, the significance of news media lies in the symbolic social reality they create. Also, as knowledge-extending institutions, news media can choose their reporting areas and problems and different ones will make different choices (Cheng et al. 1994).

Although the number of previous studies focusing especially on the role of communication in political legitimation is relatively small, they have demonstrated that political communication constitutes a distinctive dimension of legitimacy. For example, Christoph Meyer (1999) explored the European Union's communication deficit and how it links to the EU's broader institutional set-up and decision-making procedures. The research argues that the media communication has become relevant to the survival of the European Union's

core institutions (Meyer, 1999; p635).

Hurrelmann et al. (2009) in their research 'Why the democratic nation-state is still legitimate: A study of media discourse' investigated the communicative reproduction of legitimacy in Great Britain, the United States, Germany and Switzerland. They suggest that 'the research on legitimization discourse can help us understand why the legitimacy of established democracies remains stable in spite of the challenges of globalization' (Hurrelmann et al, 1999; p483). It is concluded that, firstly, the political cultures of Western countries deeply entrench the core regime principle of the democratic nation-state, which in turn serves as an anchor of legitimacy. Secondly, the normative benchmarks used to evaluate legitimacy have been shaped by democratic principles, therefore the 'de-democratisation' of legitimization discourse is prevented. Finally, many potential threats to the legitimacy of democratic nation-states are prevented by the short-lived nature of media interest and ritualistic legitimization practice (ibid).

Hurrelmann et al (1999) believe that 'the media represent only one among many arenas ... in which claims about the legitimacy of political systems and institutions are made and justified or contested, on a regular basis', yet they are 'important suppliers and repositories of the frames, interpretations and knowledge that citizens are likely to draw upon in the development and transformation of their own legitimacy beliefs, or in the translation of

behavioural dispositions into acts of support and dissent' (p487). The rationale behind this is that, in Western democracies, the media claim to serve as the interface between citizens and representatives of the political system, thereby constituting an essential part of the public sphere, where both citizens and political elites debate the performance of a regime and its authority (Habermas, 2008, cited in Hurrelmann et al. 2009). As a result, the media not only reflect people's opinions on legitimacy, but also contribute to constructing the grounds of legitimacy beliefs.

However, as we can see both studies focus on Western democracies, so what about other political regimes, such as China, which is seeking democracy under one-party rule? Is it still the case that political communication and the media are essential to the process of legitimation and, if so, in what way? The aim of this dissertation is to explore the communicative aspect of the process of legitimation in the Chinese context. More specifically, the aim is to investigate how the news media in China contribute to legitimation of the Party and the government.

Due to the short history of communication and media studies in China, academic research on the political issue of legitimation focusing on media discourse is relatively limited. Based on extensive content analysis of China Central Television National Network News and People's Daily domestic edition in 1992, Chang et al.'s study showed that news in China since the reforms in the late

1970s has 'provided the Chinese society and people with the baseline knowledge needed for the building of a forced consensus. This forced consensus is 'the basis of Communist rule and legitimacy' (1994; p52).

However, Cheng et al.'s study was carried out fifteen years ago, and only party organs were studied. More up-to-date research has been done by Xu (2009) who claims that despite the 'forced consensus' suggested by Cheng, there is the potentiality for 'public participation' within the Chinese media discourse even though, according to him, these only exist at a symbolic level at the moment. The example he gives is the study of the news coverage of national health reform from 2005 to 2007. The newspapers he chose included 'People's daily', 'Beijing Youth Daily'¹⁹ and several influential weeklies.

Xu concludes that these newspapers (even the 'People's Daily' – the mouth-piece of the Party) are able to explore issues and spark off discussions that involve relatively divergent voices. By using various reporting styles, such as editorial and commentary, the newspapers not only provide comments/criticism on government's policy but also offer suggestions about possible solutions to identified problems. However, this 'bottom-up' transformation of the power relationship is often stopped by an invisible glass ceiling that is intrinsic to the

¹⁹ A local civic newspaper similar to the 'South Metropolitan Daily', which is one of those I will examine.

current political system. In other words, the government encourages discussion and suggestions from the public on the one hand; but, on the other hand, these actions from the grass-roots can generate very little (if any) influence on policy making.

These previous researches on political communication and/or political legitimization are illuminating, providing hints about the importance of communication and media in shaping political behaviour, including legitimization of the regime and government.

3. Method

This study focuses on just one part of the mass media in China: newspapers. There are several reasons for this. The newspaper industry is less closely attached to the Chinese Communist Party than the broadcast media industries. The polarization between political power and financial resources applies to all industries within media domain, however the degree of development differs. Although some changes have been observed in China's television and radio industries, they are subject to much stricter government regulation, and the reform of these industries is relatively slow and ineffective (Lull, 1991; Guo, 2001). Furthermore, newspapers cover a wider range of audiences compared with internet/online communication. The latter is restricted mainly to the elite class and to users in urban areas. Of course, the internet can be an alternative resource in studying China's politics, in the sense that it radically differs from regular mass media in its interactivity, huge channel capacity, networking potential and capability for both massified and personalized communication (Chan, 2003). However, it is not my focus here.

3.1 Sample

Chinese newspapers can be divided into daily and weekly newspapers. The daily

newspaper dominates the newspaper market nowadays. According to Data Monitor, a global business information company, 'daily newspaper sales in 2006, generated total revenues of \$3.5 billion, equivalent to 81.5% of the market's overall value. In comparison, sales of non-daily newspapers generated revenues of \$0.8 billion in 2006, equating to 18.5% of the market's aggregated revenues' (*Newspaper in China*, 2007; p8). The sample in this study will be dailies.

Moreover, newspapers in China can also be divided into national, province-level, city-level, and county-level in terms of their scope of distribution. According to statistics from the General Administration of Press and Publication of PRC (2008), there were 1,938 newspapers in China in 2007. The national and province-level newspapers together accounted for 53.51% of all newspapers²⁰. The sample in this study therefore focuses on national and province-level newspapers.²¹

Furthermore, Cao (2007) concludes that there are five newspaper centres in China, which are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Wuhan. These five cities represent Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western and Central China

²⁰ According to CAPP's statistics, there were 221 national newspapers and 816 province-level newspapers in year 2007 (CAPP, 2008).

²¹ For the effects of administrative control at different levels on the marketization of China's newspaper industry, especially Party organs, see Chan J.M. (2003).

respectively. Among these five cities, Beijing is the capital and political centre of China. Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province and Guangdong province is the base area of China's first 'special economic zone'²², which is one of the most developed districts in China, in terms of both economic development and political transition. The reason that newspapers used in this study come from these two cities is to take into account the possible geographic discrepancy between north and south China.²³

Finally, only the party organs run and controlled directly by the CCP at different levels and mass appeal newspapers will be examined for three reasons. Firstly, more than two-third of the readership market are occupied by the party organ and mass-appeal papers together. Secondly, these two types of newspaper have undergone most radical changes in the second wave of media commercialization in China since 1992. The last but not the least, they are in the centre of

²² The 'special economic zone' was a place which enjoyed special economic policies and a relatively liberated system of economic management from the party-state started from late 1980s. Deng Xiaoping put forward this concept in 1978 as a starting point of China's 'opening-up' to the outside world. Shenzhen was the first 'special economic zone' in China. It is located on the northern coast of Guangdong province. This area is also known as 'Pearl River Delta' and also includes cities such as Guangzhou, Zhuhai and Shantou. These were cities that went in advance of others during China's opening up that started thirty years ago. Nowadays, the 'Pearl River Delta' is not only one of the richest districts in material wealth, but also the richest in terms of information.

²³ Geographic differences between newspapers may also exist in other areas of China. However, because of constraints of time and space, it was not possible to include newspapers from all five media centers in China. Although being divided very roughly, 'north' and 'south' are the most recognized and widely used cultural division for the discussion of many issues in China.

mainstream media system. Comparing with them, other types of papers are peripheral in term of lacking in number, circulation and general interest (Guo, 2001).

Two newspapers have been chosen for this study: *People's Daily* and *South Metropolis Daily*. The rationale for choosing these two particular newspapers is presented below.

3.1.1 Why People's Daily?

People's Daily is a national organ newspaper with its press house located in Beijing. It was established in 1948, one year before the founding of People's Republic of China, by the Communist Party of China (CCP). Today, it is the second largest newspaper in China in terms of circulation²⁴. According to the statistics from its official website, the paper's readership mainly includes cadres of the party-state and senior managers of enterprises.

People's Daily is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC). Together with *Xinhua* News Agency and *China Central Television*, it is one of the most important media mouthpieces of

²⁴ According to statistics from *Baidu*, the largest Chinese search engine, 'Reference News' (Can Kao Xiao Xi) is the largest daily newspaper in China in terms of circulation.

the CCP. The press office of *People's Daily* receives instructions directly from the Party. These range from policies of news publication to institutional construction of the press office. The paper's content embodies the essential principles and policies of the party-state. It is the most politically authorized newspaper in China (Huo, 2002).

According to its own declaration, the obligation of *People's Daily* is to 'promote the party's ideas, foster healthy social trends, communicate social conditions and public opinions, guide social hot spots, divert the public mood and improve the supervision by public opinion' (*People's Daily Online*). Under this guideline the layout of *People's Daily* was extended twice in January 2009 and in January 2010. The total pages of the paper increased from sixteen to twenty four every weekday²⁵. These two expansions aimed at 'enhance[ing] the ability [of the paper] to lead the public opinions, strengthening the capacity of disseminating domestically and internationally, to better implement the 'Three closenesses'²⁶ and to enrich the content and create new ways of reporting news in order to keep up with the trend of the times and satisfy the expectations of the readers' (*People's Daily Online*).

²⁵ Eight pages for each issue on Saturday and Sunday.

²⁶ 'Three closeness' is one of the guidelines of *People's Daily*, which means 'close to life, close to reality and close to the public' (*People's Daily online*)

To sum up, the content of *People's Daily* provides a good indication of the party-state's attitudes towards many issues, including the legitimization of the government. Therefore, I consider *People's Daily* as a useful source to study the role played by party organ newspapers in the process of political legitimization.

3.1.2 Why South Metropolis Daily?

In comparison with *People's Daily*, *South Metropolis Daily* (SMD) is one of the most successful commercial newspapers in China. It is a mass-appeal newspaper.

It mainly focuses on the Pearl River delta area in south China. It was established in 1997. SMD publishes the largest amount of daily pages amongst all Chinese newspapers at present – over one hundred pages every day on average. Its readership is dominated by social elites and white collar workers with higher education and between the ages of twenty-five to forty-four (*nddaily.com* – SMD official website).

SMD is one of the most reputed civic newspapers. It is known for its investigative journalism and provocative commentary. The paper is characterized by its editorial (this usually accounts for one page), which represent the position and attitudes of the newspaper office. Apart from the editorial, there is another page for 'comments from readers'. This section opens up discussion on specific topics to the public. This is consistent with its claim for 'close investigation on

people's livelihood, their feelings, their civic rights and representation of public opinions' (*nddaily.com*).

The slogan of SMD is to 'run the best Chinese newspaper'. According to the chief editor of SMD, this is designed to reflect not only the paper's high profile in the market but also self-consciousness about its social responsibility – to be one of the most progressive media in China (Zhuang, 2009). In many respects, SMD is a representative example of mass appeal newspapers in China.

So far, I have explained why the two particular newspapers are chosen for this study. This study will focus on the role of news reporting in the process of government's legitimation. This is not only a theoretical problem, but also an empirical one. In other words, how media/newspapers perform or function in legitimating the power of the party-state is a very practical question. Instead of doing theoretical analysis, this empirical research aims to demonstrate the relationship between media and legitimation through a case study. The case I choose is news reports on China's health care reform, because it represents a typical case of a current public issue in China. In the next section I will explain it in more detail.

3.1.3 Why health care reform?

The reform of China's health care system started about thirty years ago but relatively little has been achieved. According to Zhang Mao, the minister for the Chinese health department, the contradictions emerged in the process of reform focus mainly on inequality in the distribution of social resources and defectiveness of the health care system (*Chinanews*, 20 May 2009). According to the assessment from the World Health Organisation about health financing and fairness of resource distribution in 2000, China ranked 188 among all 191 member states. A report from the World Bank in 2003 shows that, the cost of medicines in China accounted for 52% of all expenditure on health care. This ratio was only 15%-40% in most countries.

Although the process of health care reform is full of problems, the government's efforts to make reforms never stop. Liu explains that '[in order] to solve the ongoing crisis of legitimacy, the ruling party and government tend to maintain political stability by means of establishing social welfare system and rebuilding public goods supplying system' (Liu, 2006: p.11). In other words, health care reform illustrates the party-state's attempt to find a new source of political legitimacy through the development of social welfare. Moreover, health care reform also illustrates the party-state's attempt to address social fairness, which

is a crucial concept in its legitimation.

3.2 Data collection

The data were collected from the two sample newspapers - *Southern Metropolis Daily* and *People's Daily* – across three weeks (16 – 29 November 2009 and 22 – 28 February 2010), following the publication of two new policies referring to the national health care reform. The first policy is the ‘Suggestions on the reformation of mechanism of price formation for medical products and services’, which was published on the 23rd of November 2009 and the second policy is the one published on the 23rd of February 2010 – the ‘Guidelines on the experimental reform of public hospitals in pilot cities’. The data includes (1) Reports/commentaries that are directly related to these two specific policies, (2) narratives that are associated with the national health care reform in general.

The period of Chinese New Year (from January to early February 2010) was deliberately omitted, as this might have been unrepresentative.

3.3 Data Analysis

A ‘health care reform focused’ item is defined as any news that had any aspect of the reforms of national health care system as its main theme. This includes news of and about the two new policies mentioned above, news of government

conference or meetings about health care reform and reports on the development of the reform with examples. A 'health care reform related' item is any news that referred to the matter in a subsidiary context. This includes news about practical issues in the process of reform, such as the establishment of medical insurance system or the increase of drug price and etc.

The next section – 'Data analysis' – is divided into two parts: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. The quantitative part of the analysis includes 1. the location and extent of coverage 2. the content of the coverage 3. amount of quotation in the news reports, 4. multiple views included in news reports 5. tone of the report (positive, balanced/neutral, negative). These are included to show the images of two papers and their attitudes toward the public issue of health care reform. In the 'qualitative part' themes drawing from the reports of two newspapers will be discussed.

3.4 Ethics

Ethical issues in relation to this study were considered, but since the data are publicly available these were judged not to be serious. However, if in future research other sources of data were to be used – for example interviews with journalists, government and party officials – then it would be necessary to consider issues such as informed consent.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Quantitative analysis

4.1.1. *The location and extent of coverage*

Here I will examine the coverage of Health care reform (HCR) in my two sample newspapers – *People's Daily* (PD) and *South Metropolis Daily* (SMD). Both gave some attention to HCR-focused and related news during the selected three week period (twenty-one days). PD assigned the stories relatively higher prominence than SMD in terms of total wordage (29,652 and 11,765 Chinese characteristics for PD and SMD respectively), the number of articles and the number of dates that HCR-focused and related coverage appears in the newspaper (PD had twenty-three articles on eleven separate days and SMD had fourteen articles on eight separate days). In order to get a sense of the prominence assigned to the stories, I assume that 'broadly speaking, the nearer the front page an item is reported and/or the more space it is given, the higher the news value it is has been accorded' (Hammersley, 2006; p85). Although the measures are not unproblematic, they are a rough guide.

HCR focused stories appeared on the front page twice in *People's Daily* – on the 16th and 25th of November 2009. A report of the team leader of 'health care

reform' (the project) in state council – Li Keqiang's speech to a working conference about the regulation of essential drugs – took 9% of the broadsheet page and continued on page four. The whole story was 1202 words in length. On the same day, there were another two HCR-focused and -related stories on page three and twelve, which accounted for 31% and 36% of the broadsheet page respectively. On 25 November 2009, a small introduction of the report on the discussion about the new policy – the 'Suggestions on the reformation of mechanism of price formation for medical products and services' appeared at the bottom right of the front page. It was 102 words in length and the whole story continued on page twelve. There was another article about the morality of doctors at the bottom of the same page. The two stories together accounted for 84% of the broadsheet page. Moreover, on 23 November 2009, People's Daily used the whole broadsheet page of page six to report the speeches of leaders from different provinces at the 'Study and practice forum' held in Xian. Health care reform and education were two themes of these speeches.

Table 1 Coverage of HCR-focused and -related stories in *People's Daily*

	<i>Position of report</i>	<i>Space on page (% of broadsheet page)</i>	<i>Number of words</i>
16 Nov. 2009	Front page + page 4	13.6%, on the bottom left of the page.	1202
	Page 3	36%, at very bottom of the page.	2489
	Page 12	31%, in the upper half of the page.	2074
18	Page 4	4%, in the lower left corner of the page.	334
	Page 12	1.7%, in the upper right corner of the page.	126
19	Page 12	7%, on the bottom right of the page	757
23	Page 6	Full-page article, including photos, and a summary box	6779
	Page 18	19%, in the middle of lower half of the page.	65
24	Page 2	29.6%, in the lower left corner of the page	1731
	Page 4	5%, in the middle of the column at far right of the page.	287
25	Front page	2.7%, at the bottom right of the page.	102
	Page 12	57%, 5/6 of upper half of the page.	2062
	Page 12	27%, 5/6 of lower half of the page.	967
26	Page 12	22%, at bottom left of the page.	1073
28	Page 2	7%, on the left-hand side of the bottom half of the page.	719
	Page 6	8.5%, at the far right of bottom half of the page	1252
22 Feb. 2010	Page 6	5.3%, on the right-hand side of bottom half of the page.	490
23	Page 2	7.7%, in the middle left of the page.	549
24	Page 9	18%, on the top left of the page.	844
	Page 9	45%, in the middle of the page, left-hand side.	2192
	Page 17	7%, in the middle of the page.	585
25	Page 13	15%, at the bottom of the page.	855
	Page 15	3%, in the lower right corner of the page.	328
	Page 19	59%, on the left-hand side of the page.	2775
	Page 19	21%, at bottom of the page.	988
<i>Total</i>			29652

On 24 November 2009, the bold printed headline ‘China’s development and reform committee clears the direction of health care reform: increase the consultation fee and reduce the price of drug’ appeared on the front page of *South Metropolis Daily*. The story took the whole page of page five, including three articles, a cartoon and a picture. On the following day, there was an

editorial on page two about the publication of new policy. The editorial was 1218 words in length. The publication of another policy about the reform of public hospital was reported on 24 February 2010 on page seventeen. The article was 2004 words in length and accounted for 1/2 broadsheet page. There was a corresponding editorial on page two on the same day, which was 1730 words in length.

Table 2 Coverage of HCR focused and related stories in *South Metropolis Daily*

	<i>Position of report</i>	<i>Space on page (% of broadsheet page)</i>	<i>Number of words</i>
17 November 2009	Page 2*	6%, in the lower left corner of the page.	356
18	Page 30	6.5%, on the right-hand side of the top half of the page.	476
20	Page 30	23%, on the left-hand side of bottom half of the page.	863
24	Front page (large headline)	12%, in the lower right corner of the top half of the page.	36
	Page 5	Full-page: three articles, including cartoon and a picture.	3649
	Page 4*	6.5%, in the middle of column on the far right of the page.	499
25	Page 2	16%, on the right-hand side of top half of the page.	1218
26	Page 31	2.2%, at the very bottom of the page.	110
29	Page 21	8%, in the middle of lower half of the page.	464
	Page 22	8.5%, on the right corner of the page.	360
24 February 2010	Page 2	30%, in the upper 1/3 of the pager.	1730
	Page 17	50%, top half of the page.	2004
<i>Total</i>			<i>11765</i>

* Pages in 'Guangzhou reader'.

4.1.2. The content of the coverage

The content of the coverage of *People's Daily* and *South Metropolis Daily* about health care reform can be divided into four categories: reports of the government

conferences on health care reform and/or leaders' speeches at the conferences; reports and comments on the publication of new policies as part of health care reform; reports on the current situation of the regional development of health care system/health care reform; and reports and comments about the practical issues relating to the reform of the health care system.

Table 3 Content of coverage (% of all HCR-focused and -related stories for each paper)²⁷

	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>South Metropolis Daily</i>
Conference and leader's speech	21%	8%
Reports and comments on the publication of two policies	21%	42%
Regional development of health care reform/system all over the country	29%	0%
Practical issues of health care reform	29%	50%
Total	100%	100%

From table 3 we can see that there are differences between two newspapers on their contents of news coverage. There are in total five news reports of the government conferences on health care reform and/or leaders' speeches at the conferences, which accounts for 21 percent of all HCR-focused and related

²⁷ In this table and subsequent ones, it is important to remember that, given that the numbers are often relatively small, the percentage figures in the tables may be misleading. Also, given that the data do not come from a random sampling procedure, it did not seem appropriate to use significance tests to assess the likelihood that the differences are the product of chance variation. It is possible, though I think unlikely, that they are the product of random error. The reliability of the coding was checked by carrying out the analysis several times and comparing the results. This is not an entirely reliable method of assessing the reliability of the coding, and in future research in this area it would be worthwhile checking inter-coder consistency.

stories for *People's Daily*. By comparison, there is only one news report on 'mobilization meeting of health care reform in Guangzhou'. There are five articles for each newspaper about the publication of two new policies relating to health care reform. Although the number of articles is same, the percentages of total HCR-focused and -related coverage for PD and SMD is different (21% and 42% in respective). Moreover, PD has seven articles about regional development of health care reform/system during the selected three weeks, whilst SMD has no such report.

Half of all HCR-focused and related news stories (seven articles) in SMD were about practical issues of health care reform, compared with 29% for PD (seven articles). This category includes, for example, people's reaction and their concern about the establishment of 'personal health records' by the local government, editorials about the need for the enhancement of medical practitioners' personal morality in order to improve the quality of medical services and the implementation of an appointment system for medical registration in hospitals at different places.

4.1.3 Multiple views included in news reports

Considering the restrictions imposed on China's mass media when reporting opinions that are opposite to official or mainstream views, the proportion of

multiple perspectives reported in the newspapers indicates the media's pursuit of professionalism (Huang and Guo, 2001). By 'multiple views' I mean pluralistic perspectives toward one public issue. Those perspectives may not necessarily be opposite to the official or mainstream point of view, they are non-unified viewpoints from different interest groups or from different people within one interest group (see appendix 2 for an example).

There are a total of twenty-three HCR-focused and -related articles in *People's Daily* in three weeks. Among these, only seven articles (30%) showed multiple views. By comparison, six articles in *South Metropolis Daily* reported multiple views, which accounted for 43% of all HCR-focused and related coverage (14 articles) during the three weeks.

The data shows that SMD tries to represent diverse opinions from different social groups, whilst PD's opinion-representing is relatively limited. Even though the proportion of articles presenting multiple views is relatively low in both papers, it was clear that SMD reserved a lot of space for non-official view. For example, in one report it was mentioned at the end of the article that 'most doctors from pilot hospitals did not want to comment (on the policy)'.

4.1.4 Quotations in news reports

Quotations in news reports reflect the question of the configuration of media

discourse – ‘who is speaking (to whom)’? The main concern here is with the similarities and differences in terms of opinions and quotations cited by the two newspapers. Broadly speaking, opinions cited in HCR-focused and -related stories can be divided into official and non-official. Official opinions are opinions or comments expressed by official bodies or government officers. Non-official opinions include opinions from hospitals/the representatives of hospitals (such as doctors and managers of hospitals), academics and professors, the public, journalists and businesspeople.

Table 4 Opinions quoted in news reports (% of all quotations in HCR focused and related coverage for each paper)

	Official	Hospital/Doctors	Professors/practitioners	Public	Journalists	Businesspeople	Source unclear	<i>Total</i>
<i>PD</i>	19%	17%	17%	8%	11%	0%	28%	100%
<i>SMD</i>	17%	17%	12%	21%	12%	4%	17%	100%

From table 4 we can see that 19% of all quotations in *People’s Daily* come from official bodies and/or government officers compared with 17% for *South Metropolis Daily*. Non-official opinions account for 53% and 66% (of all quotations in each paper) respectively. Apart from official and non-official opinions, there are narratives with no clear sign of official or non-official opinions. This category accounts for 28% and 17% respectively for PD and SMD. Clearly, SMD emphasised more the voice from the public than PD did (21% for

SMD compared with 8% for PD). Moreover, SMD has one citation from a businessman who works in medical industry whilst PD had no such quotation.

Although the differences between two newspapers regarding official and non-official opinions cited in news reports are relatively small, this may be a result of the measurement process. If the wordage is taken into account, the difference becomes larger than simply counting the number of quotations in news articles. PD quotes much more official opinion and comment than SMD. Over half of PD’s quotations come from government officials. This quantitative analysis can only give the reader a general impression of how the two papers differ.

4.1.5. Tone of news reports

Table 5 Tone of news reports in each paper (% of all HCR-focused and related coverage in each paper)

	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>South Metropolis Daily</i>
Positive	52%	14%
Balanced/Neutral	39%	64%
Negative	9%	22%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%

Table 5 shows that over half (52%) of PD’s news reports about HCR-focused and related issues are positive. In other words, twelve out of twenty-three articles in

PD use affirmative writing style when reporting issues relating to health care reform. For instance, when reporting the current development of the health care system in Jilin, Tibet and other seven provinces, PD uses the headline ‘Improving the education level and quality of medical service, solving the real problems facing grassroots people’ to highlight the fruits of HCR in these provinces (People’s Daily, 16/11/2009). In contrast to this, SMD is more inclined to balance various aspects of issues reported and shows no particular attitude toward the issues. Balanced reports account for 64% (nine articles) of all HCR-focused and related coverage of SMD over three weeks. Both papers keep negative reports, which directly disapprove of particular issues, at a relatively low level (9% and 22% for PD and SMD respectively). This may be due to the function of Chinese mass media to promote the image of the Party-state (Lee et al., 2006). For this reason, perhaps, directly negative reports about public issues in relation to the Party and the government are not commonly seen in most newspapers.

4.2 Qualitative analysis

4.2.1 People’s Daily’s reports about Health Care Reform

Theme one: the promotion of the Party’s/government’s guidelines for health care reform

As one of the main Party organs, the primary function of the *People's Daily* is to present the voice of the Party/government and to advocate its principles of governing the party-state.

Coverage of the Party's and government's conferences is an important category in PD's news coverage. Generally speaking, the function of these conferences is to allow the Party's leading figures on health care reform to present policies to lower level executives, for example functionaries in different departments of government, managers of hospitals etc. When reporting these conferences, PD used phrases to stress the Party's political guidelines, such as 'to conscientiously implement the plan and deployment of the Party Central Committee and State council....' (16 November 2009, page 1), '...to carefully study and carry out the spirit of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China and to facilitate the development of health care and education in a scientific way...' (23 November 2009, page 6) and 'the aim of this conference is to carry out and fulfil government's suggestion on health care reform and to advance the development of traditional Chinese medicine'.

Generally speaking, the guidelines of the Party/government on health care reform can be summarized in two points. Firstly, health care reform is imperative – 'this reform relates to the development of the medical and health services, the interests of the public and the health of the whole nation' (16 November 2009, page 1).

Secondly, to benefit the people is the ultimate goal of health care reform.

However, there was no clear definition of who ‘the people’ are and whether there are any differences among ‘the people’.

Theme two: the fruits of health care reform

Another theme of PD’s coverage is the harvest of the health care reform. 21% of PD’s HCR-focused and -related coverage is about the development of health care system/reform. The paper not only applauded the development of medical and health services, but also used examples to support this. These examples can be divided into two types – the example of specific hospital with outstanding achievement and the regional development of relatively under-developed areas, such as Tibet, Qinghai, Ningxia, Guizhou province. Statistics were used to illustrate the outcome achieved by these areas.

Reports about the achievement of specific hospitals focused on aspects such as quality of services provided – such as ‘Shenzhen Shenlian Hospital – was responsible and satisfied the patients’ (28 November 2009, page 2) – and/or advanced management systems – ‘Hospital in Henan province put forward a new model of “pay after consultation”’ (25 November 2009, page 15). Moreover, one report about the regional development of medical and health services demonstrated that ‘the province [Qinghai] established a unified system of health records for peasants and herdsmen, 58% of them had their own health record

[Jilin province] had solved more than 2900 problems relating to “difficulties of seeing a doctor” and “the morality of doctors”.... [in Guizhou province] in order to collect people’s opinions and suggestions on the quality of medical and health services, 39,000 medical practitioners visited 8350,000 patients....’ (16 November 2009, page 3). In addition, state financial input is another indicator of the development of health care system according to PD. For example, one article about the health care reform in Fujian province emphasised that ‘in 2009, Fujian invested 7.63 billion (Chinese Yuan) to support five main tasks of health care reform. [This number] is 2.332 billion more than last year...’ (22 February 2010, page 6).

Theme three: criticism on the lack of medical ethics including the morality of medical practitioners and the ethos of hospitals

The morality and sense of responsibility of medical practitioners is another theme focused on by the *People’s Daily*. The paper also sees the lack of medical ethics as the root of many problems in health care reform. For instance, one signed article ‘An elder from Hubei province whose right leg is fractured but the doctor operated on his left leg – sense of responsibility is more important than skills’ attributed this shocking incident to the doctor’s lack of responsibility and pointed out that this circumstance is not unusual all over the country. Another commentary on violent conflicts between doctors and patients suggested that ‘[to

solve the problem] depends on fostering the ethics and morality of doctors and hospitals, it is also depends on the establishment of an effective mechanism to protect the interests of patients' (26 November 2009, page 12).

This emphasis on medical ethics is consistent with the Party's idea of 'harmonious society', which considers morality as the ultimate source in solving social conflicts and an essential factor in governing the country.

To sum up, the *People's Daily's* coverage of health care reform and related news emphasised on what had been done, both at macro and micro level, as part of the health care reform, and that the government and the Party were the important driving/leading force behind the changes. Whereas, those at 'lower' level, notably doctors, are to blamed for the problem stem from a lack of appropriate ethical commitments. This could be read as designed to deflect blame for problems away from the government.

4.2.2 South Metropolis Daily's reports about Health Care Reform

In contrast to the *People's Daily's* coverage of health care reform, *South Metropolis Daily's* coverage is closer to the people's daily life and the actual effect of reforms carried out under the Party's leading principles.

Theme one: Problems and the reasons for problems in the process of health care reform

When reporting HCR-focused and -related news, the *South Metropolis Daily* emphasised the problems that exist in the current system of health care as well as potential problems with the government's new policies. All fourteen articles relating to health care included the word 'problem'. The focus was on problems in the implementation of specific measures or on the general unsoundness of the health care system. Meanwhile, the paper also tried to provide possible reasons of those problems.

For example, an article entitled 'Firewall is needed for residents' health records' pointed out the problem of leakage of residents' personal information. The 'follow-up services' provided by sellers of health care products using this information had resulted in harassment of residents. At the end, the article also suggested that 'how to ensure the health care records are used only for public purpose, how to stop the 'blackhand' harming the public information and how to build the 'firewall' are the questions the local government should answer' (17th November 2009, page 2).

There was also a report about Professor Zhang Zaiyuan who was dismissed by the university when he was in a critical medical condition because of the university's unwillingness to pay for his high health expenses. The article attributed this 'tragedy' to the absence of medical insurance. It suggested that the lesson we should learn from Professor Zhang's case is the need to establish a

system of medical insurance. Although the article did not mention directly the word 'government', its criticism here is effectively blaming the government.

Moreover, SMD also addressed the (potential) problems in the process of implementation of the government's new policies. These problems are reflected in the discrepancy between the expected results and the actual effects on people's daily lives. In an editorial – 'To increase the consultation fee and reduce the price of medicine, does it work?' – the author wrote that 'Like for many policies published previously by the government, I take a cautious attitude toward [the new one – 'Suggestions on the reformation of mechanism of price formation for medical products and services']. The reason is that the sense of the public [about the policy] is more real than the words [of the policy]. However, there is discrepancy between how the masses actually feel and the [imaginary] effect of the policy most of the time. For instance, "to increase the consultation fee" does not mean the previous cost is low, or the cost of the fee had never been increased before. The fact is that it is more and more expensive for people in Guangzhou to see doctors' (25 November 2009, page2). Data from a news report published on the previous day was also used to support the author's point of view. The data showed that the cost of consultation fees increased from 172 Chinese Yuan in 2008 to 185 Chinese Yuan in 2009.

Theme two: the role the government should take in the process of health

care reform

Health care reform is a public utility initiated by the government and participated in by the whole society. Being able to manage the relationship between different stakeholders – the government, the market and the citizens – is crucial to the success of the reform. Like the *People's Daily*, *South Metropolis Daily* also expressed its own perspective on the role the government should play, its responsibilities and position in the process of reform, through news reports. One theme of the news reports in SMD over the three weeks was that the government should balance the interests of various stakeholders.

In the first place, SMD sees the intervention of government as necessary. For example, in the article 'The "life-saving" skills of doctors working at grassroots units need to be improved' the interviewee called for the government to establish a training system to improve doctors' first-aid skills, even though some hospitals have had such trainings provided for doctors working at grassroots community. On the other hand, SMD also highlights the lack of government intervention at previous stages of reform, which led to difficulties in ordinary people seeing doctors²⁸. It was pointed out in an article that 'because there was not enough state

²⁸ The previous stage of health care reform was to bring market factors into health care system and leave the distribution of medical resources to the market. The government planned to withdraw from the direct management of the hospital. One of the consequences of this principle was a rise in the price of drugs to compensate for cuts in government subsidies.

compensation (for the hospital), an increase in the revenue of hospital by excessive sales of drugs was inevitable' (24 February 2010, page 17). Therefore, in order to re-establish the public welfare of public hospitals (the goal of health care reform at the current stage) government intervention and state compensation is indispensable (24 February 2010, page 17).

Moreover, the paper defined it as the responsibility of the government to conciliate the contradiction between the people, the corporations and the hospitals. First of all SMD affirmed the positive side of the government's new policies. It was suggested in one report 'the bright spot of this "Suggestion" ['Suggestions on the reformation of mechanism of price formation for medical products and services'] is that the interests of all parties have been considered....including the masses, hospitals, pharmaceutical and distribution companies' (24 November 2009, page 5). In a report of the second policy ('The guidelines on the experimental reform of public hospital in pilot cities') SMD put forward the point that the role of government should be to establish and ensure a sound mechanism of incentives for medical practitioners. This is to protect the interests of medical staff working in non-profit public hospitals.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this part, I will discuss ideas highlighted by features of the two newspapers' coverage, and the relationships between newspapers and political legitimization in today's China.

5.1 Reasons for the differences in coverage between the two newspapers

The distinctive characters of the two newspapers – *People's Daily* and *South Metropolis Daily* – were reflected in the quantitative and the qualitative analysis of the news content of health care reform coverage. This can be explained in terms of three factors: firstly, the level of the newspaper; secondly, the respective attributions and related functions of the two newspapers; finally, the readership and the dependence of the newspapers upon the interest of their readers.

First of all, in terms of the level of newspaper, PD is a national Party organ, which covers news from all over the country. By contrast, SMD covers only the area of Pearl River Delta. Therefore, its news coverage is more parochial and more targeted. This explains the absence of certain types of coverage from SMD compared with PD, for example, the reports on the central government's working conferences about health care reform. SMD, as a local newspaper (however, its

influence and reputation are national), lacks an incentive to be more interested in these conferences of central state organs or other provinces than news about local government in Guangdong.

However, the level of each newspaper only explains partially the different coverage by PD and SMD. More details can be explained by the different functions of the newspapers and their closeness to the Party and the government. PD, as one of the most important Party organs, is closely related to the Party and the central government. Its task is to present the voice of the Party. The 'mission' of the paper is 'to disseminate the mainstream values' (*People's Daily*, 24/11/2009; page 4). And 'mainstream value' in the context of the Chinese party-state must be consistent with the values of the Party. Or, at least, as a party organ the 'values' claimed by this paper must not challenge the values of the Party and the central government. This feature of the *People's Daily*, to some extent, has limited the paper's choices of news report and the diversity of opinions expressed through news coverage. As a result, few counterviews are represented.

By contrast, SMD is functionally defined as a mass appeal newspaper. It is relatively detached from the Party and the government compared with PD. Even though it has a tangled relationship with the local government, its financial independence allows SMD a certain level of power that it is able to negotiate

with the government. This feature allows the paper to include divergent contents and different point of views. Inclusion of multiple views and diversified quotations in news coverage helps the paper to build up its image of professionalism, as 'the most professional newspaper in China', and as a 'responsible' civic newspaper.

Moreover, PD and SMD have different readerships. Likely interest on the part of readers probably explains some of the differences between two papers. In other words, the editors' interpretations about what news will interest readers are likely to be different. Readers of PD may expect to be provided with an insight into the policies or attitudes of the Party and the government, whilst readers of SMD are more likely to care about what is happening around them and how these events may actually have effects on their daily lives.

5.2 Functions of legitimating the Party-state

In addition to the effect of readership, the papers not only cater for the interests of their readers, they also define the interest of the readers through news selection. In other words, what we read as readers of newspapers is pre-defined and selected by the editors according to their interpretation. In this sense, it is rather about the question of 'what the editor or the newspaper wants us to know' or 'what the newspaper considers important to us'. *People's Daily* and *South*

Metropolis Daily both assigned a high level of attention to news focused on or related to health care reform. This means that they both considered that the topic of health care reform was something that might interest their readers as well as something that the readers should know about. As we have seen, though, despite this consistency, the two papers provided rather different kinds of coverage.

5.2.1 Differentiating the dominant from the subordinate

According to Beetham (1991), 'all social relations of power, and the rules of access and exclusion on which they are based, presuppose the differentiation or separation of the dominant from the subordinate. This separation is justified on the grounds that those who hold power possess qualities lacking in those subordinate to them' and the qualities can be demonstrated through 'performance and achievement' (p77). Both newspapers emphasised the distinction between the powerful (the Party and the government, whose power needs to be justified) and the subordinate, in their news coverage about the public issue of health care reform.

In the PD large amount of news reports about the official actions around the reform contributed largely to the importance of the Party and the government in leading 'the people' and taking control of and organising public issues such as health care. This importance is best reflected in the paper's large amount of

reports on the principles of the Party. With these 'principles' the Party and the government is pictured as well-organized, and able to be representative of 'the people' and to represent its interests. These claims were further supported by concrete examples (about the achievements of health care reform) that showed the high quality of performance of the Party and the government. In other words, the achievements of health care reform were used as evidence to prove the competence possessed by the Party-state in running the country.

To what extent this kind of report on health care reform is effective in terms of legitimation is uncertain. On the one hand, to overly stress a particular theme (the theme of prosperity) might result in the information provided by PD being too narrow. On the other hand, this 'narrowness' serves to maintain the consistency of the content of *People's Daily*, which is in line with the values of the Party-state, therefore, create a 'forced consensus' within its readers, notably the leading group of the country.

By contrast, SMD's reports on health care reform emphasised the role of the government as 'public servant' responsible for balancing the interests of different stakeholders. Comparing PD's broad but rather vague definition of 'the people' (clearly, PD's emphasis reflects the perspective of the dominant, the 'leaders' of the country), SMD's definition of 'the people' is more comprehensive and differentiated. The paper appreciates the differentiations within those classified

as ‘the people’ and recognises that there may be conflicts between the interests of each group/stakeholder – the doctors/hospital, the patients, the professors and the businesspeople.

5.2.2 Claims about the common interest

Despite the differentiation between the dominant and the subordinate, legitimisation requires the belief that these two groups are also linked by a community of common interest and that ‘the distribution of power serves the interests of the subordinate, and not those of the powerful alone’ (Beetham, 1991; p82). The subordinate must not be excluded from power, they must be included through participation in a shared moral order (ibid). According to Beetham (1991), there is an essential distinction between ‘the failure of a system of power to serve the interests it claims and the absence of any such claim in the first place’ (p86). In this context, it might be argued that PD’s and SMD’s news reports on health care reform helped to support the claim that there is a common interest between the Party-state and the public.

PD claimed explicitly that ‘serving the ultimate interests of the people’ is the mission and duty of the Party and the government through its news coverage on the leading principle of the Party-state. The voice of the dominant represented by PD delivered a clear idea that health care reform is a public utility that is in line

with the interests of the people. Therefore, what the Party and the government are doing is to link their interests with the interests of the people. On the one hand, this claim can be viewed as the dominant's recognition that the subordinate have interests of their own which merit consideration. On the other hand, PD's disproportionate focus on this aspect of the Party-state and its lack of coverage of feedback from 'the people' about health care reform demonstrates the assumption of the Party-state (the attitude represented by the newspaper) that it defines the interests of the public. The dominant – the Party-state – defines what the general interests are for the public in a 'top-down' manner.

By contrast, SMD's coverage serves to make these claims from the bottom up. This is done by paying more attention to the voices of stakeholders other than the Party-state. SMD's criticism of the process/implementation of the reform illustrated the gap between what was defined as in accord with the interests of the subordinate by the dominant and how the public actually sees its interests (the interests of the public represented/claimed by the newspaper). This, to some extent, creates an image that the public will have their say and participate in dealing with public issues. In this sense, the health care reform is transformed from a government action to a public issue that related to the common interests of everyone.

In sum, the two newspapers created a symbolic environment where the power of

the Party-state was legitimated in terms of the belief shared – a belief shared between the dominant and the subordinate about their own interests in the issue of health care reform. In other words, the papers served to make claims, firstly, about the importance of the Party-state as the dominant, and secondly, about the shared interests that link the Party-state and the public. These claims themselves are important, despite the fact that the actual practice of the health care reform is widely believed to be less than satisfactory in serving the interests of the public. Because the existence of these claims showed that the Party-state sees the interests of the people as something meriting consideration. This in turn supports the legitimation of the Party-state.

5.3 The limitations of this study

Firstly, the range of sample chosen by this study is relatively small. The study only includes two newspapers. This is due to time constraints and limitations on the availability of resources. However, broadly speaking, the two papers selected are representative of the types of Chinese newspapers focused on. Moreover, the purpose of this study is to provide illustrations that can be followed up in further research.

Secondly, the analysis focused mainly on ‘the justifiable content of rules’, and sometimes a little wider than this, according to the second criterion of Beetham’s

idea about the legitimation of power. It was impossible to include every aspect of political legitimation. The aim of this study was to generate a hypothesis about the relationship between the legitimation of power and the function of the media through the example of China. Further researches are suggested, for example, on the internet, which might be seen as more liberal and empowering compared with the traditional print media.

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Appendix 1 – The newspapers’ structure of content

People’s Daily

In terms of the structure of content, *People’s Daily* contains five essential sections: (1) the ‘highlights’ from pages one to five covers mainly issues related to the party-state’s daily work, ranging from various activities of the leadership to policies and performance of the government at different levels. (2) The ‘view point’ is the editorial of the paper. (3) The ‘theory’ section discusses political principles and guidelines of the party-state. It also discusses representative cases associated with the practice of these political principles and guidelines. The ‘theory’ section is the most distinctive feature of *People’s Daily*, as it can rarely be found in most of other mass-appeal or commercial newspapers (4) General news covers news from different domains – economics, politics, culture, society, sports and international news. (5) The ‘supplement’ is additional to the paper. It covers different themes according to the focus of the government work during specific period of time.

South Metropolis Daily

The content of SMD is divided into sections A, B, C, D and etc. Section A covers mainly the most recent political issues and social news in general at both national and provincial level. Local news about Pearl River Delta area dominates section A2. This is further divided into different folds that are tailored for each of the cities/areas covered by SMD (*Guangzhou* reader, *Shenzhen* reader, *Dongguan* reader, *Foshan* reader and etc.). Section A3 is the weekly magazine that covers various domains through the week including 'In-depth' weekly magazine (every Wednesday), 'Golden property market' (every Friday) and 'Nanfang commentary' (every Sunday). Section B contains news of entertainment, sports and culture. Moreover, B2 is specifically designed for life style. Section C contains economic news. C2 is divided further to cover the information from motor markets and personal financial markets. Finally sections D, D1 and D2 are magazines that provide information of living and consumption locally. From the design of the newspaper we can see that it is consumer-oriented.

Appendix 2 - Example of news report with multiple views

People's Daily's reportage on 25 June 2009 reported the discussion between different groups of people – those from pilot hospitals, hospital directors and experts (including academics and practitioners of medical and health services) – about the government's decision to lower the drug prices and to increase the consultation fee. This decision aims to solve one of the conundrums in health care reform, which is 'the revenue of hospital relies on the sale of expensive drugs'. Different points of views are expressed in this article towards this government decision. The representatives from pilot hospitals consider that the 'increase in consultation fee' does not make up for loss of revenue resulting from the 'decrease in drug prices' without other effective complementary measures. It is suggested that 'although relevant departments in the government increased the charges of some medical services and items by 4%, this had little effect on making up the loss of income for the hospital due to low drug price'. Likewise, experts and medical practitioners expressed similar views, suggesting that medical services should have a reasonable return and the key for this is to build up a practical price mechanism. Directors from other hospitals, however, pointed out that to increase the quality of medical services it is essential to increase

charges. These perspectives are not directly against the official point of view, instead different interpretations about the decision were expressed.

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